

IR Report on 2022 Lane Program Review Lookbacks

The Independent Reviewer conducted Program Review Lookback interviews from March-April 2022. Reviews were done to capture every region in the state. Ultimately the breakdown of the Reviews were as follows:

- 5 interviews with VR
- 10 interviews with school transition programs
- 6 interviews with CDDPs
- 6 interviews with Brokerages
- 20 interviews with Supported Employment Providers

The individual program review lookback questionnaires were transmitted to the parties, along with this summary of findings.

VR Program Reviews:

Highlights:

- Communication between VR and transition is a strong component of success for transition-aged youth in Oregon.
- IR noted that there appears to be more VR engagement in IEP meetings and with school staff, caution to not just rely on YTP specialists so that non-YTP participants benefit from the collaboration.

Remaining Issues from both 2022 and 2020 Review:

- Barriers to obtaining VR services in a timely manner were identified in some regions, and in a couple of areas, no VRCs are present (Curry County and Pendleton). There are long waiting lists in Washington County and in the metro Portland area. This leads to problems including wait lists for intake, and the slowing of the systems due to COVID. New staff and turnover was also noted as a barrier.
- It was noted multiple times that communication between the agencies could improve, on an individual case basis.
- VR systems not working in coordination with other services for example: "If someone is in EPC or small group, but lands a job before being found eligible for VR, there are other supports and structures through ODDS so sometimes we encourage people to bypass VR so our papers and process don't get in the way"
- All interviews with VR indicated concern of needing more job developers and job coaches. Every interviewee noted that capacity has been negatively impacted since COVID. Specifically, hiring job developers trained to work with people with IDD was a major challenge, resulting in long wait times for job recruitment.

Case Management Reviews:

Highlights:

- Issues with completing CDPs seem to have been eliminated.
- IR reports strong understanding of when/how to complete a DNE, if necessary.
- There was a lot of excitement about the way that a new data system will impact client experiences and improve how the employment process moves.

- Assigning Regional Employment specialists as the point persons was reported to be very helpful and makes a huge difference.
- The changes from the pandemic, in types of services offered, including Employment Path Community, and Small Group, also has impacted how long people are staying in the service. IR reports that at times some people choose to stay in small group, even with support to find other work. But the issues around EPC and small group being a place where individuals routinely get stuck on their path to competitive integrated employment seems to have improved.

Remaining Issues from both 2022 and 2020 Review:

- There is variability in the timeline for VR services negatively impacts individuals with IDD' motivation to pursue employment. In one interview it was reported that they were told that they can bypass VR, and approve an ISP and six months of initial coaching.
- There is continued variability in when and how case management entities engage VR, transition and employment providers in developing the CDPs for clients with IDD. Several case management entities highlighted ways that they engage in parallel processes or having separate meetings outside of the ISP that includes those entities so the focus is on employment.
- Lack of choice advising so that students with IDD are informed about the ability to select brokerage services was raised in every brokerage interview. This is particularly important given that brokerages tend to have smaller case loads. Also, concerns about younger students (under 18) knowing what adult services are available depending on family situation.
- Provider capacity concerns, generally a need for more job coaches and job developers trained to support people with I/DD. Also despite all case management entities reporting people with significant support needs obtaining CIE, there was a clear consensus that there are not sufficient job coaches and job developers who can work with those with higher support needs.
- Process maps for CDPs and VR were suggested, with a proactive list of folks who *could* be invited.
- There were some case management entities that reported a lot of success with the EPC model. However in a handful of interviews, it was still described as a place that some individuals could get stuck.
- On the questions around group employment, it was clear that this service has shrunk during the pandemic. However it was noted in several interviews that people who use that service are often unwilling to try a different service.

Employment Provider Program Reviews:

Highlights:

- The technical assistance that ODDS has provided throughout the pandemic was raised as a positive by multiple interviewees.
- There was a lot of positive comments about the financial support during the pandemic, and excitement around applying for ARPA and other grant opportunities to expand capacity.

- Across the board the employment opportunities seem to be abundant, and more people are returning to services and interested in restarting or beginning to pursue CIE.
- Higher numbers of people working 20 hours per week or more.
- Most providers reported return to pre-pandemic capacity, despite some reports of having to pause taking new clients for some services based on capacity.

Remaining Issues from both 2022 and 2020 Review:

- Capacity issues remain a concern and multiple providers noted that the pandemic limited their growth and changed their organizational capacity.
- There continues to be a lack of supported employment providers willing to serve persons with more challenging needs, in significant part due to payment and rate issues.
- The PSW/job coaching model was mentioned in multiple interviews as a helpful piece of the solution. However it was noted that the PSW/ job coaching process could be simplified and made more intuitive so that more people participate and people coming into the work see it as an automatic option.
- There still is not a strong connection or high referrals for transition-aged youth. The connection between schools and providers remains particularly weak.
- The mention of providers “bypassing VR” came up multiple times. When IR inquired further it was raised that they would find jobs and get case management to fund job coaching vs. waiting for VR.
- In terms of invites to CDP meetings, it was clear that this remains an issue, but there do seem to be more attempts at some level of input and engagement than what was reported in 2020.
- Concerns about rates going down over the summer were mentioned by multiple interviewees. Also strong support of new EPC 1:1 rate, but capacity concerns make that hard.
- The categories of jobs and examples of places where people are working was extensive., However there remained to be a common theme among the categories of jobs being based in food service, grocery, manufacturing, landscaping, janitorial or retail jobs. The types of jobs varied from courtesy clerk, document shredding, custodial jobs. But there were examples shared of full time, skilled employment for some people. Restaurant work was reported as an area of overall growth across the state.

Transition Program Reviews:

Highlights:

- More of the transition programs are partially or completely community-based.
- The use of school businesses has gone way down due to the pandemic, and anything raised was integrated.
- More focus on individualization of work experiences was noted by the IR. Types of job sites varied but included: transportation, food service, inventory, public works, garden centers, park and recreation. One person working as a personal trainer was noted.

- Transition conversations and services do seem to be starting much earlier than even the last review, including with a focus on CIE.
- Both TNF and YTP staff support was raised over and over as a positive factor to accessing CIE.

Remaining Issues from both 2022 and 2020 Review:

- Outside of YTP or summer programs, the vast majority of work experiences are either internships, or other unpaid opportunities. Also, only a few districts reported any tracking for paid employment.
- Work experiences generally seem to be short in duration, and the opportunities are tied to the transition program. While there are more opportunities leading to CIE than in 2020, this remains concerning.
- The connection between employment providers and transition seems minimal in most districts. The connection points need to be made clearer. It was raised that profiles of local employment providers would be valuable to all districts.
- Most interviewees reported that there are no limitations on the times of day that a student can work, and that the programs are flexible to support employment. However, school staff can only support during school hours. In order to increase opportunities for paid jobs in school, need more support with job coaching
- It was noted across the board that less transition students were graduating with CIE, while some of that is pandemic related, that was a note of concern.